

Growing in the Life of Faith



Education and Christian Practices

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ & REFLECT

- ▣ Read Chapter 1
- ▣ Reflect on the Question:
 - Is the contemporary church a tomb or a path?

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

□ Synopsis: The Problem Defined

- There is in Christian churches, and in the United States as a whole, a profound spiritual hunger for something.
- ...historical peoples have engaged in such practices as fasting, tithing, ordered worship, Sabbath-keeping, private prayer, devotional reading, meditation on death, and self-denying service to the sick and needy precisely as disciplines for rescuing their lives from dull conformity and spiritually unsatisfying existence.
- I worry that as more and more people turn to the churches for renewed encounter with the texts and practices of Christian faith, they will discover too few who really know what these texts and practices are.

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ & REFLECT

- ▣ Read Chapters 2 & 3

- ▣ Reflect on the Questions:
 - What is faith?
 - How do we grow in the life of faith?

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

□ Synopsis: The Solution Described

■ A Life-Giving Faith

□ Meanings of Faith

- Believing, trusting, committing and orienting life
- Being related to God in a particular way
- Acknowledging our need of God's love and freeing power; recognizing that this has been given to us and to all the world; and, in response, loving and proclaiming to the world the One who provides this tender mercy
- Believing in.....; believing that.....
- Recognizing, realizing and knowing.....
- The knowledge of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

□ Synopsis: The Solution Described

■ A Life-Giving Faith

□ Meanings of The Life of Faith

- Life in Christ
- Life “according to the Spirit”
- A life characterized by.....
 - Togetherness
 - New freedom
 - The ongoing struggle with evil
 - Consecrated service
 - Hope and perseverance

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

- ❑ Synopsis: The Solution Continued
 - Through Participation in the Means of Grace
 - ❑ Within the context of a community
 - ❑ As that community carries on its life through certain “practices” that are constitutive of the shape of its life together in the world
 - ❑ John Calvin, “external means or aids by which God invites us into the society of Christ and holds us therein.” - - *The Means of Grace* - -
 - ❑ Participating in the disciplines of the church does not bring about or cause faith or growth in the life of faith. Rather, engagement in the church’s practices puts us in a position where we may recognize and participate in the work of God’s grace in the world.

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

- ❑ Synopsis: The Solution Continued
 - Means of Grace a.k.a. Christian Practices
 - ❑ Worshipping God together
 - ❑ Telling the Christian story to one another
 - ❑ Interpreting together the Scriptures and the history of the church's experience
 - ❑ Praying
 - ❑ Confessing
 - ❑ Forgiving
 - ❑ Serving and witnessing
 - ❑ Giving and receiving
 - ❑ Showing hospitality
 - ❑ You add to the list

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ & REFLECT

- ▣ Read Chapters 4 & 5

- ▣ Reflect on the Questions:
 - Why are Christian practices so powerful?
 - What, exactly, is a practice; and what is “peculiar” about a Christian practice?

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

- ▣ Key Concept: The Power of Christian Practices
 - In the midst of engagement in these practices, a community comes to such an immediate experience of the grace and mercy and power of God that the “nasty suspicion” that permeates much of contemporary American church and intellectual life – the suspicion that theology is really about nothing more than human subjectivity – simply loses its power.

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

- ❑ The Power of Reading and Hearing the Scriptures
 - God uses the Bible to.....
 - ❑ Render **an agent**, namely, God
 - ❑ Render **a promise**, namely, that God can be depended upon to keep promises
 - ❑ Render **a way of living** that makes sense in this world and in the light of the God who reigns in it
 - This way of living.....
 - ❑ Has the power to place us where we can receive a sense of the presence of God
 - ❑ Turns out in the end not primarily to be practices, efforts. They turn out to be places in the contours of our personal and communal lives where **a habitation of the Spirit** is able to occur. And it is this that is the source of their power and meaning.

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

□ Key Concept: Practices

- Those cooperative human activities through which we, as individuals and as communities, grow and develop in moral character and substance

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

▣ Teaching and Learning Practices

■ Questions

- ▣ What practices are essential?
- ▣ What moves, skills, understandings, and convictions are essential for engaging in particular practices?

■ Task of Christian Education

- ▣ Teach all the basic practices of the Christian faith

■ Conditions for Optimal Learning

- ▣ We are active in the practices.
- ▣ We participate jointly with others.
- ▣ Others become more personally significant to us.
- ▣ Our practice becomes broader, more varied and more complex.
- ▣ We become more able to articulate the significance of the practice.
- ▣ We take on more personal responsibility for initiating, pursuing and sustaining these practices.

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

- ▣ The Peculiarity of Christian Practice
 - The human task is not fundamentally mastery. It is rather the right use of gifts graciously bestowed by a loving God for the sake of the good that God intends.

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ & REFLECT

- ▣ Read Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
- ▣ Reflect on the Question:
 - Where and how can Christian practices be taught and learned?

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

- ❑ Location: the congregation
- ❑ Core Practice: Worship
- ❑ Notes:
 - God uses community as a “means of grace”
 - Worship is the core of congregational life and provides the paradigm for its peculiar form of life

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

- ❑ Location: the family
- ❑ Core Practice: public liturgies
- ❑ Notes:
 - Family is constituted by promises. “Family” is a peculiar set of promises. It is promises that make the family, before it is the family that makes promises.
 - Promise-making, not promise-keeping, constitutes the family.
 - One of the important ways in which the Christian faith makes conscious, public, and binding the promises that are central to the family is through its liturgies.

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

- ❑ Location: ministry with youth
- ❑ Core Practice: interpretation
- ❑ Notes:
 - The issue is not a matter of getting young people to talk “church talk” but of helping them find a way to speak and images to speak with that make religious language a gift.
 - Reasons why we fail to teach young people this language and use it with them.
 - ❑ We, ourselves, do not really know and use the language of faith in any meaningful way.
 - ❑ Far too much of the language that we think of as religious is either so abstract and lifeless or so authoritarian and moralistic in character that it either is simply useless in daily discourse or is something rightly to be avoided.

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

- ❑ Location: religious communities, colleges and universities
- ❑ Core Practice: paying attention to the Ultimate
- ❑ Notes:
 - Religious communities, precisely because they bear within them a long, deep, rich, historical tradition attentive to ultimacy, have the capacity to provide the denser resources required for the formation of character and vision.
 - Colleges and universities form students morally most thoroughly and most powerfully through the fundamental patterns of inquiry, learning, and teaching that they practice. To the extent that they succeed in guiding students into attention to what is real, they succeed in the formation of both character and vision.

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

- ❑ Location: theological institutions
- ❑ Core Practice: love's knowledge
- ❑ Notes:
 - The single most important thing about theological education in the future of the church and culture is that these schools actually **be** communities-of-faith-and-learning, guided by a theological vision in which faith and learning are bound inextricably together in something like the essential intimacy of love's knowledge.

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ & REFLECT

- ▣ Read Chapters 11, 12, 13

- ▣ Reflect on the Question:
 - What are some of the signs that indicate the formative power of Christian practices are bearing fruit in the lives of those who desire to live faithfully?

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ & REFLECT

- ❑ Sign #1: The Bible Happens to Us
- ❑ Questions to Guide Effective Bible Teaching
 - What changes do we hope for the learners? What kinds of transformation do we believe the Bible is calling us into?
 - What do the learners need to do so that such changes may take place?
 - What do I, as teacher, need to do so that the learners can do what they need to do, so that these changes may take place?
- ❑ Reflect on the Question:
 - Read the last sentence of Ch.11. What are some actions you could take that would help to nurture this way of thinking among the teachers in your Chapel communities?

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

- ❑ Sign #2: We Learn to be Sent
- ❑ Concept: Christian Education & Nurture
 - Are for the sake of mission
 - Are themselves forms of mission
 - The place of education and nurture in the mission of the church is central, because it is through education that we learn who we are as sent ones of God and are sent into mission ourselves.
- ❑ Reflect on the Question:
 - On p. 159, the author makes 2 claims about Christian education and Christian nurture. How do you see these 2 claims at work in your Chapel communities?

Growing in the Life of Faith

READ

- Sign #3: We Make Bread
- ***"My teacher, we made bread together and I ate it and it was good."***
- Reflect on the Question:
 - What is a "bread-making" experience you have witnessed or participated in during your career as an Army religious educator?

Growing in the Life of Faith

RENEW

- ❑ Based on your reading, and using your own words, respond in writing to the “Reflect on the Questions” in this reading guide.
- ❑ Based on your personal interest and/or professional calling, choose and complete one of the activities on the following pages.
 - The Formative Power of the Congregation
 - Family Promises
 - Youth and the Language of Faith

Growing in the Life of Faith

RENEW – Choice #1

- ❑ The Formative Power of the Congregation
 - Choose one of the following aspects of public worship.
 - ❑ Praise
 - ❑ Confession, Forgiveness and Assurance of Pardon
 - ❑ Reading and Interpretation of God's Word
 - ❑ Prayer
 - ❑ Self-offering
 - ❑ Communion
 - ❑ Benediction and Blessing
 - Design a one-time educational event for congregation members with the goal of enhancing their participation in that aspect of worship.
 - Include a resource list of 3-5 psalms, hymns and/or spiritual songs that are in some way related to this aspect of worship and would enhance your teaching/learning experience.

Growing in the Life of Faith

RENEW – Choice #2

□ Family Promises

- Choose a family “promise-making” moment.
 - Marriage
 - Adoption
 - Baptism
- Choose an audience.
 - Children
 - Youth
 - Adults
 - Families
- Design an event with the goal of interpreting for participants the promise-making aspect of that moment.
- Include a brief liturgy in the event.

Growing in the Life of Faith

RENEW – Choice #3

- ❑ Youth and the Language of Faith
 - Choose one of the “big” theological words below.
 - ❑ Grace
 - ❑ Redemption
 - ❑ Salvation
 - ❑ Church
 - Design an educational experience for young people with the goal of interpreting one of these words with them.
 - Include a list of 3-5 resources that would enhance your teaching/learning experience with young people. These may include songs, film clips, poems, works of art, etc.

Growing in the Life of Faith

RECOMMENDED READING

- ❑ Bass, Dorothy, ed. Practicing Our Faith
- ❑ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. Life Together
- ❑ Miles, Margaret. Practicing Christianity
- ❑ Sawicki, Marianne. Seeing the Lord's Resurrection and Early Christian Practices

- ❑ For the most recent scholarship, news and information on Christian practices visit www.practicingourfaith.org